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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR ELAINE SAMSON, EUR/WE
OSD FOR COL PATRICK MCCLELLAND

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: SPANISH DEFENSE MINISTER CHACON RECEIVES U.S.
AMBASSADOR

REF: A. MADRID 610
[1](#)B. MADRID 568

Classified By: Ambassador Eduardo Aguirre, for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: New Spanish Minister of Defense Carme Chacon, who took office April 14 but has been on maternity leave since May 19, told Ambassador Aguirre during a congenial one-on-one breakfast meeting June 10 that she looked forward to working with the United States and would like to meet with her U.S. counterpart when an opportunity presents itself. The two discussed the bilateral defense relationship, with special emphasis on Spanish overseas deployments, especially Kosovo and Afghanistan. Chacon and the Ambassador also covered the June 3 congressional notification of the sale of Tomahawk missiles to Spain; the status of Spain's request for the LAIRCM aircraft protection suite; U.S. use of the Spanish bases of Moron and Rota, including ship visits and sensitivities related to Gibraltar; NATO enlargement; and opportunities for Spanish cooperation with the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). Minister Chacon described herself as a friend of the United States, as evidenced by her eagerness to meet with the Ambassador even before she returns to work o/a June 30. The very friendly meeting lasted 90 minutes and included the presentation by the Ambassador of a stuffed animal Bald Eagle chick for Minister Chacon's newborn son. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Minister Chacon told the Ambassador she would like a pull-aside with Secretary of Defense Gates at the next NATO defense ministerial opportunity. While interested in seeing Secretary Gates, Chacon did not foresee traveling to the United States. Note: Spanish Secretary General for Defense Luis Cuesta had told the DCM on May 29 that MOD Chacon (because of her maternity leave) would not be going to the June NATO meeting but would attend in September, and would probably seek an appointment with SECDEF at that time (ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) On a number of issues, Minister Chacon made it clear she was pleased to discuss but not yet aware of Spanish equities. She offered no comment, for example, when the Ambassador raised NATO enlargement, urging that Spain support Membership Action Plans (MAP) for Ukraine and Georgia. She likewise asked the Ambassador about the status of LAIRCM but seemed satisfied the U.S. Embassy was doing all it could to help protect Spain's Head of State and Head of Government aircraft. While unfamiliar with U.S. procedures for notifying the intent to sell TLAM to Spain, she was pleased with the Ambassador's efforts to push for notification and interested in the outcome. On Gibraltar, MOD Chacon was pleased to learn the U.S.-Spanish Permanent Committee would hold an informational meeting June 17, and yet expressed the

Spanish hope U.S. ships would call at Rota whenever possible.

14. (C) Regarding Afghanistan, MOD Chacon assured the Ambassador Spain was considering the possible deployment of Spanish police trainers. She noted the original request had been for Civil Guard trainers. The Ambassador explained that either Spanish National Police or Civil Guard expertise would be welcome, and left it up to Spain to determine the most appropriate contribution. Minister Chacon assured the Ambassador that Spain also remained committed to Kosovo. She went on to suggest that the Spanish military, absent GOS recognition of Kosovo's independence, had greater credibility with Serb forces and might therefore have a calming effect in the region. The Minister told the Ambassador that Spain's parliamentary cap of 3,000 on personnel deployed overseas was real, and said she could not imagine it being raised or eliminated.

15. (C) On AFRICOM, the Ambassador noted the June 8-11 visit of General Ward was an important opportunity to exchange views on a subject of great strategic interest to both countries. Chacon was aware of the June 9-10 meetings and expressed a desire to place a Spanish liaison officer in AFRICOM. Reiterating the AFRICOM Commander's message to the CHOD, the Ambassador said AFRICOM would be pleased to have a Spanish officer, probably toward the end of 2008 once the command was better prepared to host one. Chacon noted that Spanish public opinion would be critical in determining the level of GOS engagement with the new command. While the GOS was interested in being a part of efforts in Africa, much work remained to be done and she asked that the USG coordinate closely with Spain on next steps.

16. (C) The Ambassador referenced the June 13 extradition to the United States of notorious Syrian arms dealer Monzer Al-Kassar. Though Minister Chacon seemed to disregard media speculation of an increased threat to Spanish personnel in Lebanon and elsewhere, the Ambassador urged the Minister to be aware of possible repercussions and to take necessary steps to protect Spanish forces participating in UNIFIL.

17. (C) COMMENT: Chacon's cordial invitation and subsequent approach to the Ambassador, even while she is still on maternity leave, echo the cooperative tone she adopted while serving as Minister of Housing. The Minister's assertion the deployment ceiling would not be raised, in apparent contradiction of Chief of Defense GEN Sanz's statements in the context of June 5 meetings with U.S. military visitors, may or may not reflect an entrenched GOS position and could be more an indication that Chacon is technically still on leave. Senior members of her policy staff have told Post certain initiatives await the new Minister's input or go-ahead (reftels) and the CHOD indicated he planned to lobby internally to advocate eliminating the political cap. In anticipation of the end of Chacon's maternity leave and planned June 30 return to the Ministry, on the eve of Spanish summer vacations, only time will tell how Spain plans to meet its international obligations. Adding overseas missions within current deployment ceilings will require some combination of creative accounting (including setting aside law enforcement training personnel), the use of political capital to relax congressional strictures on individual missions, and the possible incorporation of Latin American troop contributing countries under Spanish auspices from Lebanon to Afghanistan.

AGUIRRE